

# Ticks

## The Importance of Tick Control Measures

Ticks are common in the Midwest U.S. and Wisconsin. Ticks serve as vectors for transmitting several diseases including ehrlichiosis, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and Lyme disease.

## Lyme's Disease

Lyme's disease is a serious problem in animals and is the most common arthropod-transmitted illness in humans in the United States. It is caused by a spirochete named *Borrelia burgdorferi*.

This microscopic bacterium is transmitted to animals (or people) when *Ixodes* species infected ticks (e.g. northern deer tick) feed on a host. Thus, early detection and removal of ticks is an important strategy for disease control.

Although pets do not transmit Lyme's disease directly to humans, they may pose a risk by introducing ticks into a household. For example, ticks do not like cats, and may drop off of a cat to find a more suitable meal from a dog or human.

Lyme's disease is difficult to diagnose in pets for several reasons. First, the owner may not know that the pet had a tick bite. Second, dogs do not show the skin manifestation of 'erythema migrans' that humans usually have on their

skin at the location of a tick bite. Also, current blood testing for diagnosis can be inaccurate.

The clinical signs of Lyme's disease in a dog include sudden 'shifting leg' lameness, joint pain, fever, lethargy, poor appetite, swollen lymph nodes and sometimes, heart or kidney problems.

Lyme's disease vaccination is recommended for any dog with a lifestyle that may expose him/her to ticks (especially wooded areas or high grass/bush areas, etc.). The Lyme's vaccine is recommended to be given yearly, preferably just before tick season starts in April.

## Tick Prevention

Tick prevention measures are strongly recommended in tick infested areas such as Wisconsin.

General rules of tick avoidance include:

- Keeping pets on a well-mowed yard where wild animals find little cover and bright sunlight can dry out and kill any ticks that are present.
- Protect dogs with topical products, such as Frontline, that help repel and kill ticks before they attach or can transmit diseases.
- Examine dogs often for ticks and remove promptly.

## Removal of Ticks

When removing a tick from your pet, make sure that you do it correctly. Pull the tick gently and steadily away from the skin with a tweezers at the point of tick attachment (or use tick removers designed to make the process simple). If part of the tick's mouthpart remains in the skin, a

foreign body reaction may result.

Avoid crushing the tick during removal so the bite wound is not contaminated. After removal, disinfect the site of attachment.

## Tick Prevention Products

There are several different tick prevention products on the market. You should choose the product(s) that best suits your pet's individual needs.

*Frontline* (fipronil) is a topical product placed between the shoulder blades on the pet's skin once a month. There is also a Frontline spray that can be used when your dog goes into the woods or high grass areas.

Beware of some of the less expensive, over-the-counter flea and tick products. Many use chemicals such as permethrin - which can be very irritating or may cause a reaction.

## Indoor Infestations

There is another reason to use tick control measures on your dog - an infestation in your home. Although it is usually a temporary problem, the brown dog tick can complete its entire life cycle in a domestic setting.

Gravid females tend to crawl upward and can deposit up to 3,000 eggs in protected places (e.g. cracks and crevices, ceilings). The larvae then move downward and hide around baseboards, windows, curtains and in furniture.

Each stage of the tick's life cycle can persist for several months without a blood meal. Thus, premises may even be infected long after dogs are gone.

*Ticks and tick-borne diseases should be taken seriously - an ounce of prevention is well worth it!!!*